

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8062

INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 8386

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR-BR, PGOV-BR, EGEN

SUBJ: GEISEL COMMENTS ON DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: BRASILIA 8280

1. SUMMARY: IN HIS TOKYO REMARKS TO BRAZILIAN PRESS PRESIDENT GEISEL TIED FURTHER LIBERALIZATION OF POLITICAL SYSTEM TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS, INDICATING FULL DEMOCRACY STILL FAR DOWN THE ROAD. PRESIDENT ALSO STATED HIS OPPOSITION TO AMNESTY FOR THOSE OSTRACIZED BY 1964 REVOLUTION AND TO REMOVAL OF EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES. GEISEL DENIED THAT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER CONSTITUTED A PLEBESCITE ON THE GOVERNMENT, AND EMPHASIZED THAT HIS PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT REFLECTED HIS COMMITMENT TO STRENGTHENING MUNICIPALISM AND THE TWO PARTY SYSTEM AT THE GRASS ROOTS. DOMESTIC POLITICAL REACTION HAS GENERALLY BEEN ALONG PARTISAN LINES, WITH BOTH CONSERVATIVE AND MODERATE POLITICAL ELEMENTS FINDING REASON FOR ENCOURAGEMENT AND REASSURANCE IN THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS.

2. LIBERALIZATION. THE PRESIDENT ADMITTED THAT BRAZIL DID NOT HAVE FULL DEMOCRACY, WHICH HE FELT COULD NOT EXIST WHEN THERE

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WAS HUNGER, MISERY AND ILLITERACY. ASSERTING THAT FULL

DEMOCRACY HAD TO COME GRADUALLY, GEISEL SAID HE COULD NOT GUARANTEE THE TRANSFORMATION IN HIS TERM NOR THAT OF HIS SUCCESSOR. HE ADDED THAT HE GAVE PRIORITY TO PREPARING THE GROUND FOR A TRULY DEMOCRATIC REGIME, BUT THAT IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO HAVE A PERFECTLY DEMOCRATIC REGIME IN A COUNTRY WHICH HAD POCKETS OF POVERTY LIKE THE NORTHEAST. BRAZIL COULD NOT COPY THE DEVELOPMENT MODELS OF THE INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES "WITHOUT FIRST EVOLVING THROUGH DIVERSE PHASES." HE AFFIRMED, HOWEVER, THAT "DISTENSAO"--THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM -- IS TAKING PLACE, BUT AT A LOW RATE OF SPEED BECAUSE CONDITIONS ARE UNFAVORABLE.

3. AMNESTY FOR POLITICAL PROSCRIPTS. ASKED WHY THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT AMNESTY POLITICIANS PUNISHED BY THE REVOLUTION, GEISEL INDICATED "HE HAD NOTHING AGAINST ANYONE AND NO RANCOR BUT A PRESIDENT HAS TO BE HARD, OBJECTIVE AND COLD, AND NOT GOVERNED BY SENTIMENTALITY."

4. ELECTIONS. GEISEL INDICATED HIS MAJOR PREOCCUPATION NOW IS WITH ELECTIONS, NOT ONLY THE NOVEMBER 15 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS BUT ALSO 1978 CONGRESSIONAL AND GOVERNORS RACES. THE PRESIDENT DENIED THAT THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS COULD BE CHARACTERIZED AS A PLEBISCITE FOR THE GOVERNMENT. HE STRESSED THE CIVIC ROLE OF ELECTIONS IN DEVELOPING MUNICIPALISM" AND DEMOCRACY AT THE GRASSROOTS, WHICH HE AS PRESIDENT MUST HELP FOSTER. HIS PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE AS TO HAVE THE POLITICAL PARTIES CONSOLIDATE THEMSELVES, GIVING THEM FORCE AND COHESION. GEISEL URGED THE PARTIES TO STRENGTHEN THEMSELVES IN THE MUNICIPALITIES, INDICATING THAT HE WOULD ENGAGE IN THE CAMPAIGN BECAUSE HE WANTED TO STRENGTHEN THE PARTIES AND HE PARTICULARLY WANTED ARENA TO ASSUME ITS ROLE AS A POLITICAL PARTY. HE SAID THAT HE MUST SUPPORT ARENA BECAUSE HE IS ITS HONORARY PRESIDENT AND RECEIVES HIS PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT FROM IT. GEISEL ADDED, "WE HAVE TWO PARTIES, AND ONE OF THEM IS THE OPPOSITION. THERE MUST BE TWO PARTIES; I DON'T WANT AT REGIME OF ONE PARTY." HE BLAMED ARENA'S POOR 1974 ELECTORAL SHOWING ON THE PARTY'S SOFTNESS AND PASSIVITY.

5. NEW CONSTITUTION. IN RESPONSE TO A PRESS QUERY RE
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DISMANTLING DISTASTEFUL PROVISIONS IN THE PRESENT CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM, PRESIDENT INDICATED HE SAW NOTHING TO BE GAINED FROM BRAZIL HAVING A NEW CONSTITUTION. HE WOULD BE OBLIGATED TO CHANGE IT SIX MONTHS AFTER IF ONE WAS WRITTEN. HE ADDED THAT IT WAS SUFFICIENT THAT HE NOT ENFORCE PRESENT SYSTEM AS RIGOROUSLY AS OTHERS HAD BEFORE HIM IN AN OBVIOUS REFERENCE TO AI-5. ASKED ABOUT OTHER POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM, GEISEL SAID HIS ENTIRE ATTENTION WAS ON THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS AND

ONLY AFTER THEM WOULD HE THINK OF 1978 (NATIONAL ELECTIONS)
AND 1979 (ELECTION OF HIS SUCCESSOR).

6. ON THE TECHNOCRATS. IN DEFENSE OF TECHNOCRATS IN THE
CABINET, PRESIDENT NOTED THAT IT WAS THE FASHION THESE
DAYS TO CRITICIZE THEIR PERFORMANCE. TECHNOCRATS HAD AN
IMPORTANT ROLE IN NATION BUILDING, HE SAID, CITING JAPAN
AS AN EXAMPLE. "BESIDES THE TECHNOCRATS HAD STOPPED
BECOMING POLITICIANS AND WERE ACCEPTING POLITICAL DECISIONS."
IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT THERE BE COOPERATION BETWEEN TECHNOCRATS
AND POLITICIANS; IT WAS AFTER ALL, ONLY A QUESTION OF COMMON
SENSE.

7. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. GEISEL NOTED THAT PARALLEL SOCIAL
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WERE NECESSARY FOR BRAZIL AND
CLOSELY INTERTWINED WITH POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT. HE CAUTIONED
THAT DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY WAS A SLOW PROCESS. IT WAS
NECESSARY TO REDUCE THE DISPARITIES BETWEEN RICH
AND POOR OR THE COUNTRY WOULD ALWAYS BE AT THE MERCY OF
POLITICAL AGITATION AND CRISIS WHICH HARMED ECONOMIC
PROGRESS. ONE OF THE REASONS FOR JAPANESE-BRAZILIAN
COMMERCIAL COOPERATION WAS PRECISELY THE GUARANTEE OF
POLITICAL STABILITY THAT BRAZIL OFFERED INVESTORS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BRASILIA 8386

8. POLITICAL REACTION. POLITICAL REACTION TO GEISEL'S STATEMENTS HAS BEEN ALONG PARTISAN LINES. IN CONGRESS ARENA SPOKESMAN HAVE ECHOED AND DEFENDED THE PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENTS RE ELECTIONS, NO AMNESTY AND THE NEED FOR MORE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS BEFORE FULL DEMOCRACY CAN EXIST. SAO PAULO GOVERNOR EGYDIO, FOR EXAMPLE, CLAIMED GEISEL'S STATEMENTS WERE REALISTIC AND WERE NOTHING MORE THAN WHAT ANY OBSERVER OF BRAZILIAN'S POLITICAL SCENE ALREADY KNOWS. THE MDB AS EXPECTED HAS ATTACKED PRESIDENT'S UNPROMISING STANCE ON LIBERALIZATION. ASSEMBLY OPPOSITION LEADER LAETE VEIRA INDICATED THAT ONLY THE VOTERS ARE ABLE TO JUDGE THE PUBLIC INTEREST. HE QUESTIONED HOW A VOTER COULD GIVE GRASSROOTS SUPPORT TO A PARTY WHEN THERE WAS NO GUARANTEE THE PARTY WOULD GOVERN IF ELECTED, EXPLAINING THAT THE BEST WAY TO STRENGTHEN THE PARTIES WOULD BE TO TURN OVER TO THEM THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNING. OTHER MEMBERS OF MDB ALSO BROADLY ATTACKED GEISEL FOR LINKING FULL DEMOCRACY TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, WHICH THEY SAW AS A FORMULA FOR INDEFINITE POSTPONE-
MENT.

9. PRESS REACTION. REACTION TO THE VISIT AND THE PRESIDENT'S
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PRONOUNCEMENTS IS STILL PERCOLATING THROUGH THE PRESS, BUT GEISEL HAS GENERALLY RECEIVED HIGH MARKS FOR HIS PERFORMANCE AND HIS OPENNESS. JORNAL DO BRASIL PRAISED GEISEL'S CLARITY AND SINCERITY, AND CALLED FOR HIM TO SPEAK MORE TO THE NATION ABOUT CRITICAL PROBLEMS. EDITORIALS AND COMMENTARY, REFLECTING THE GENERALLY LIBERAL BENT OF THE MEDIA, TENDED TO LAMENT GEISEL'S DISCOURAGING VIEWS ON THE PROSPECTS FOR RAPID LIBERALIZATION, BUT SOME SAW HOPEFUL SIGN IN HIS COMMENTS THAT LIBERALIZATION ACHIEVED SO FAR WOULD AT LEAST BE MAINTAINED.

10. COMMENT: THE PRESIDENT'S OFF THE CUFF COMMENTS IN JAPAN ARE HIS CLEAREST AND MOST COMPREHENSIVE STATEMENT IN MONTHS ON DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROSPECTS AND HIS INTENTIONS. WHILE THERE ARE OF COURSE AMBIGUITIES, ONE MESSAGE COMES ACROSS FAIRLY CLEARLY: THERE WILL BE NO RESUMPTION OF THE RAPID RATE OF "DISTENSAO" THAT MARKED HIS FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE AND WHICH ALARMED THE MORE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS OF HIS REGIME AT THAT TIME. HIS DENIAL OF THE PLEBISCITARY CHARACTER OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, HIS CHARACTERIZATION OF THOSE ELECTIONS AS LITTLE MORE THAN DIDACTIC EXERCISE IN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE GRASS ROOTS LEVEL, AND HIS REDEFINITION OF HIS ELECTORAL ROLE AS PROMOTOR OF PARTISAN PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC SPIRIT ALL HELP TO EX-
TRICATE HIM FROM WHAT HIS ADVISORS FELT WAS A RISKY OVERIDENTI-

FICATION OF HIMSELF AND THE PRESTIGE OF THE REVOLUTION WITH A POLITICAL PARTY THAT COULD BE DECISIVELY OUTVOTED IN NOVEMBER. EVEN SO, THE MAGISTERIAL CAMPAIGN ROLE HE HAS FORMULATED FOR HIMSELF WILL JUSTIFY HIM EXTENSIVE PERSONAL PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS AND, WE SUSPECT, IF THE VOTING SHOULD GO WELL FOR ARENA, GIVE HIM THE OPTION OF CLAIMING THAT THE ELECTION WAS VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN HIM AND THE REVOLUTION AFTER ALL.

11. THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS HAD SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE. THE HARDLINERS OF THE REGIME COULD TAKE COMFORT FROM HIS INDICATIONS THAT THERE WOULD BE NO AMNESTY, NO RAPID DEMOCRATIZATION, AND NO END OF THE EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES. BUT BRAZILIAN LIBERALS TOO, AFTER INITIAL DISCOURAGEMENT, HAVE TAKEN SOME COMFORT FROM SOME OF HIS STATEMENTS THAT CUT BOTH WAYS. WITH CONTINUING RUMORS AND WARNINGS FROM THE CONFIDENTIAL

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RIGHT OF A POLITICAL HARDENING AFTER THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS, POLITICAL MODERATES WERE HEARTENED BY THE PRESIDENT'S ASSUMPTION THAT THE 1978 ELECTIONS WOULD TAKE PLACE. AS FOR THE PROSPECT OF NO NEW CONSTITUTION, SOME LIBERAL ELEMENTS HAVE INTERPRETED THIS AS RULING OUT A NEW FUNDAMENTAL LAW DRAWN ALONG MORE AUTHORITARIAN LINES. THE PRESIDENT'S ASSURANCES OF THE CONTINUATION OF THE PRESENT TWO-PARTY SYSTEM MAY HAVE HEARTENED ARENA'S WARD HEELERS, BUT IT IS NOT LIKEOY TO OFFSET THE MOUNTING EXPECTATION THROUGHOUT POLITICAL CLASS THAT SOME FORM OF PAARTY RESTRUCTURING WILL FOLLOW THE ELECTIONS. THE PRESIDENT OF COURSE CAN HARDLY SUGGEST ARENA'S POSSIBLE DEMOSE AT A MOMENT WHEN ALL EFFORTS ARE ON BUCKING THE ALREADY DISPIRITED PARTY UP FOR ITS NOVEMBER SHOWDOWN WITH MDB. FINALLY, THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS CONFIRM HE IS STILL IMPROVISING HIS POLITICAL STRATEGY AND KEEPING HIS OPTIONS OPEN ON MAJOR POLITICAL INITIATIVES UNTIL HE HAS SEEN THE NOVEMBER ELECTION RESULTS. JOHNSON

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